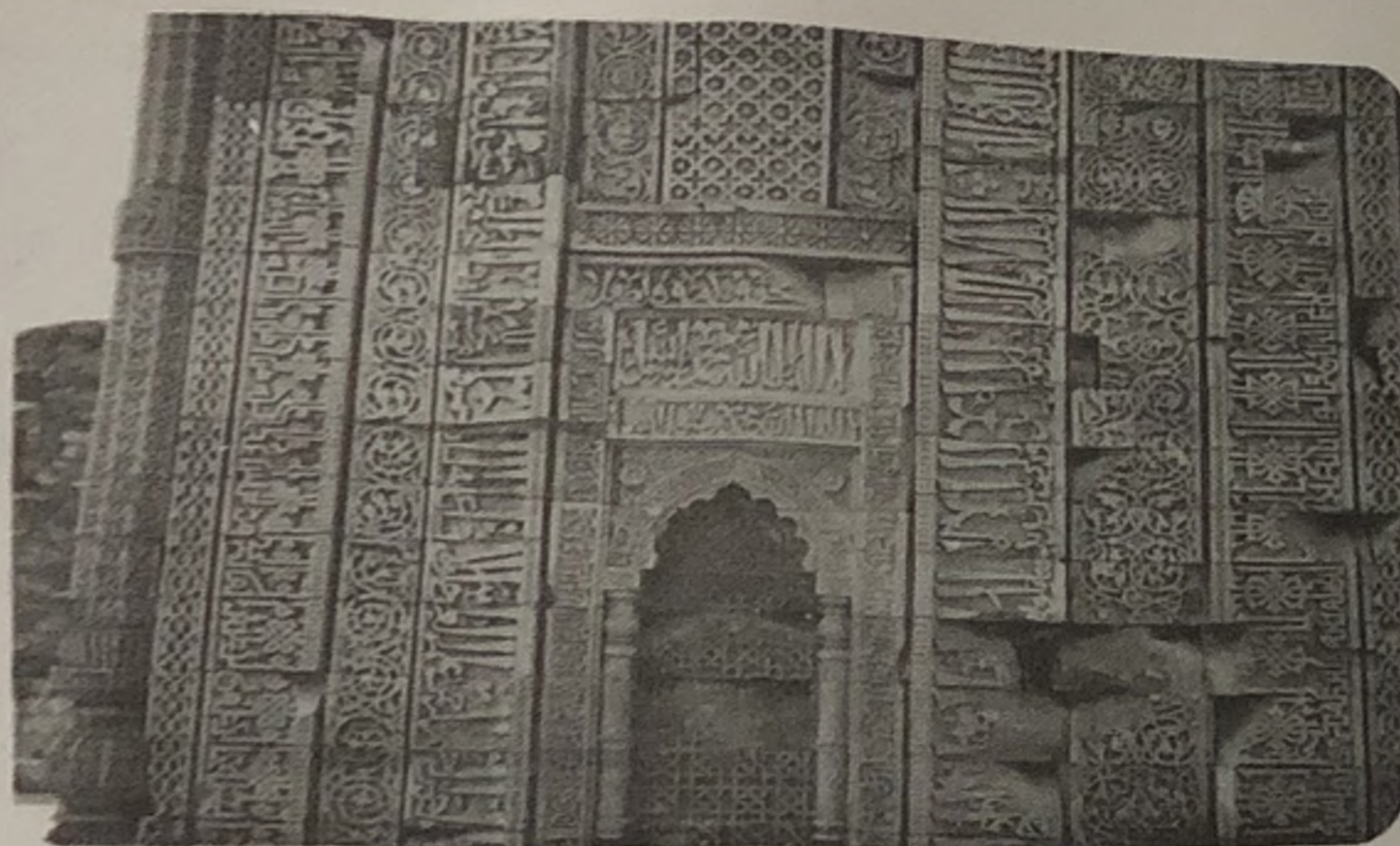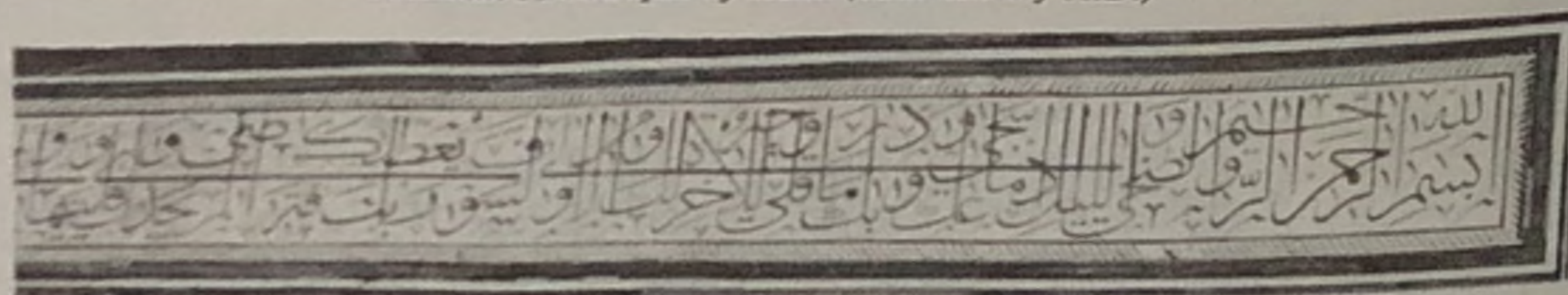# Islamic
and
Western
concepts
of
CIVILIZATION

By

Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg,

Mamluk Arabesque of Delhi (13th century A.D.)

Mughal calligraphy (c. 17th century A.D.)

The Buland Darwazah ('High Gate') of Emperor Akbar's city —
Fathpur-Sikri (16th century A.D.) (Photographs by the author)

PREFACE

Civilization is a fascinating subject. There is an ever increasing trend of popularity of this subject in the Universities of "developing" and developed nations alike. The subject is vast in scope and it has the widest appeal to cross-section of people in almost all literate societies.

Civilization is abstract. It has its manifestations in spiritual experience of men, in creative art and intricate architecture, in languages and written records, in socioeconomic developments as well as scientific and technological advancement of a given society. The study of civilization brings into focus a society's progress and advancement in all spheres of life within a specific period of history.

This study is intended to refute some misconceptions about civilization, and also to promote an understanding of the concept of civilization in accordance with Islamic and Western ideas.

27 May, 1979   — Author.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The Malay version of this essay which was published in *Islamiyat* (vol.,ii, 1979, pp. 37-61) a journal of the Faculty of Islamic Studies of Kebangsaan (National) University of Malaysia and the English second edition of the book have been sold out. It was a great success. Hence we are publishing the third edition. Its improved quality is expected to be very useful for our students and general readers.

Malaysia,   — M.A.J Beg
28 Ramadan, 1402
20 July, 1982

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

'The trouble with the term civilization is that it has been badly mauled and its meaning twisted. Sometimes it is used to mean that a particular society is urbane and mature, relatively free of the irrational Serpent in the rational Garden of Eden. In that sense there has never been a truly civilized people except in the literature of the imaginary voyages and the Utopian romances. There is a second sense in which politicians and editorial writers use the term as a "we or they" bludgeon against the enemy, whether in war or cold war. We have so often heard that "civilization is at stake" in the outcome of some struggle, martial or diplomatic, that we may well wish the wretched term disposed of forever. This is how Mark Twain felt about Western civilization at the time of the Boer War, when he said, "My idea of our civilization is that it is a shabby poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogancies, meannesses, and hypocrisies. As for the word, I hate the sound of it, for it conveys a lie; and as for the thing itself, I wish it was in Hell, where it belongs." But he hastens to add: "Provided we could get something better in the place of it. . . . Poor as it is it is better than real savagery." These inner tortures of Mark Twain, so much like the splits in intellectuals today, are further evidence that civilization as a concept must be extricated from emotional distortions and used objectively.'

—Max Lerner

in *America as a civilization*

evasive; it likes to remain satisfied with hazy notions about certain things rather than grasp the import of difficult concepts. Mystery intrigues man. The word civilization seems to intrigue all of us. It is, however, a duty of the professional scholars to explain difficult concepts to inquisitive learners.

We shall be happy to explain the etymology, the terminology, and the substance of civilization. We shall endeavour to arrive at some befitting definitions of the term 'civilization'. We like to reproduce some interpretations of Islamic civilization by eminent scholars like Ibn Khaldun, Toynbee and others. We intend to quote illuminating ideas of Muslim scholars such as Muhammad Asad and Muhammad 'Abduh on the bases of Islamic civilization.

TERMINOLOGY

Arab writers have given different names to civilization. The first Islamic historian to write on civilization was Ibn Khaldun who used the word '*umrān* to express the concept of civilization. Ibn Khaldun's admirer and translator of *al-Muqaddimah li-kitab al-'ibar* in English — Professor Franz Rosenthal translates the term '*umrān* as urbanization and civilization[1]. What was called '*umrān* in the 14th century is represented by civilization in the 20th century. Ibn Khaldun was the founder of Civilization Studies in the world. His writing was inspired by a unique vision of history. When Ibn Khaldun wrote on '*umrān*, the word civilization was not yet born in the English language. As late as 1772 A.D. the English lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-84 A.D.) refused to enter the word civilization[2] in his dictionary of the English language. He preferred the use of the word 'civility' in the same sense. "Since then, it has become current in all modern languages in the meaning of a particular kind or phase of culture that has been in existence during a particular age." The first well-

known usage of the word civilization appears in English books[3] during the 19th century A.D. We can, therefore, assume that the word and the concept of civilization were born in Europe during the 19th century A.D.

From an etymological point of view, the word civilization is closely linked with urbanization. "Civilization is derived from the Latin word for city *civitas*. There is reason to emphasize this derivation, for every great civilization has had great cities and the basic characteristics of civilization are easiest to observe in cities."[4] This is the etymology of civilization. Some anthropologists also emphasize the fact that "Each civilization expands from its metropolitan centres, bringing the surrounding area under economic and political domination, and cultural influence (e.g., the Egyptian, Aztec, and Greek civilizations."[5]

Let us now explain the Arabic terminology of civilization. Literally, the Arabic word '*umrān* (an infinitive n. of عَمَرَ) means "*A land or house inhabited, peopled, well peopled, well stocked with people and the like; in a flourishing state; in a state contrary to desolate or waste or ruined; a land colonized, cultivated or well cultivated; a house in a state of good repair*". ...... '*It is also a subst. signifying* بُنْيَان , *a building, a structure, an edifice; or perhaps the act of building.*'[6] In other words the word '*umrān* implies sedentary life which is the basis of all civilizations. Ibn Khaldun used the word '*umrān* repeatedly in connection with his study of cities or towns founded by Islamic rulers, or ancient dynasties.

Ibn Khaldun also used the word *ḥaḍārah*[7] alongside the term '*umrān*; but *ḥaḍārah* then meant 'sedentary life' and nothing more. The word *ḥaḍārah* in the time of Ibn Khaldun did not mean civilization. The translator of *Muqaddimah* translates *ḥaḍārah* in Ibn Khaldun's text as 'sedentary'. The semantic shift of the word *ḥaḍārah* occurred in modern Arabic. Modern Arab writers are now using the word *ḥaḍārah* as a synonym for civilization. The late

Professor G.E. von Grunebaum[8] recognized the new meaning of the word *haḍārah* and translated it as 'civilization'. Literally, the word *haḍārah* means, "A region, district or tract, of cities or towns, or villages, and of cultivated land." (Contr. of بَدْوٌ)[9]

An eminent Arab writer, Kurd 'Ali, made effective use of the word *haḍārah* in his book on civilization entitled *al-Islam wa'l-haḍarah al-'Arabiyah*, that is, "Islam and Arab civilization". An Arab writer Dr. Muhammad 'Abdul Hadi translated Adam Mez's book *Die Renaissance des Islam* (English translation by Khuda Bukhsh, The renaissance of Islam, Patna, 1937) with the Arabic title *al-Hadarat al-Islamiyah fi'l-qarn al-rabi' al-hijri* (Cairo, 1957). The translation of the word "renaissance" in the title of Adam Mez's book "Die Renaissance des Islam" into Arabic *haḍārah* by 'Abdul Hadi is not literally accurate. The word for renaissance in Arabic is *nahḍah*. Therefore, Mr. Hadi's usage of *haḍārah* suggests that it means 'renaissance'. This type of careless use of the word *haḍārah* by modern Arab writers may discredit the word and raise serious doubts about the suitability of the word *haḍārah* as an Arabic substitute for civilization. Similarly V.V Bartold's book (in English translation) entitled "Mussulman Culture" is translated into Arabic under the title *Haḍārah al-Islamiyah*. In this particular usage, *haḍarah* means "culture".

It appears that *haḍārah* is an imprecise and elastic word. From the semantic point of view, however, *'umrān* and *haḍārah* may be grouped together. The 14th century usage of the word *'umrān* and the 20th century usage of the word *haḍārah* may be quite similar, but not identical. *Haḍārah* comprises of the culture of cities as well as villages. Therefore, *haḍārah* and civilization are not strictly identical in meaning and significance. This is why some Arab writers are less than happy to use *haḍārah* in the sense of civilization. They prefer some other Arabic words to describe civilization.

The 19th century ended and the 20th century began with the appearance of the word *madaniyah* in the writings of some Islamic scholars. The names of two important scholars viz., Muhammad Farid Wajdi and Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh are associated with the usage of the term *madaniyah* as a synonym for civilization. Wajdi produced his book *al-Madaniyah wa'l-Islam*, i.e. civilization and Islam in 1899 A.D. It was an apologetic[10] book. Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh serialised his book *al-Islam wa'l-Nasraniyah ma' al-'ilm wa'l-Madaniyah* ("Islam and Christianity in respect of science and civilization) in the Egyptian journal *al-Manār* in 1901 A.D. Subsequently, this book was published in 1920 A.D. It is interesting to note that Shaykh 'Abduh used the word *madaniyah* in the sense of civilization in his Commentary on the Qur'an well-known as *Tafsir al-Manār* or *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim*[11]. Both Wajdi and 'Abduh were influential writers of their generation. They gave the word *madaniyah* a new lease of life in modern Arabic language, and it was accepted by their contemporaries as the standard term for civilization.

Nearly a millennium ago before Shaykh 'Abduh, the word madaniyah appeared in the title of an Arabic book on political science entitled *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyah* by Abū Naṣr al-Farabi (d. 339H.). According to Sa'id al-Andalusi, al-Farabi, in his *Siyāsat al-Madaniyah*, demonstrates, "the need of the cities for the royal ways of life and divinely revealed laws (Shari'ah)."[12] The word madaniyah in Farabi's usage meant "urban" or "city life", but 'Abduh meant "civilization" by the same word. It is one of the typical instances of how an Arabic word in classical Arabic literature connotes one thing, but it means something very different in modern Arabic. Although madaniyah is more appropriate than *haḍārah* in the context of civilization, yet the usage of the former proved abortive. The usage of *madaniyah* for civilization ceased after the generation of Shaykh 'Abduh.

In spite of its lack of popularity, the word *madanīyah* relates to civilization or city-based culture, because it is derived from the Arabic word *madīnah* or city. The link between the Latin word civitas and civilization is very much similar to the connection between *madīnah* and *madanīyah*. This is so, due to the fact that cities usually precede civilization, and civilization emerges in cities. There is almost a cause-and-effect connection between city and civilization. (cf also L. Carl Brown (ed), *From Madina to Metropolis*, Princeton, 1973, 38; also *The Muslim World*, U.S.A., Vol. LXVIII, No 2, 1978, 112).

For some unknown reasons, the word madanīyah, in spite of its etymological accuracy and semantic relevance to the modern concept of civilization, failed to make an impáct upon the Arabs. Lack of popularity and charm caused the premature collapse of the word *madanīyah* as a term for civilization in modern Arabic. It was replaced by another word of the same origin, i.e., *tamaddun* which is an attractive substitute for *madanīyah*. Somehow, *tamaddun* as a term for civilization has better luck than its predecesor.

The Arab author who gave currency to the word *tamaddun* as a synonym for civilization was Jurji Zaydān. His book *Ta'rikh al-tamaddun al-Islami* is the most widely read Arabic book on Islamic civilization. Zaydān was well-versed in classical Arabic literary and historical sources and was also familiar with the works of modern European writers on civilization.[13] Zaydan's understanding of the modern concept of civilization was better than that of most Arab writers. This is one of the reasons why his work on civilization was a great success. Within a decade of its publication, this five-volume study of Islamic civilization was translated not only in Persian Turkish and Urdu, but also in English and French. It was a successful work on Islamic civilization in modern Arabic. In spite of its general usefulness, major portions of *Ta'rikh al-tamaddun*

*al-Islami** have now become badly outdated and need re-writing or revision. Because, Islamic research has advanced very rapidly during the last few decades. Zaydan's book on Islamic civilization is still popular as the many new editions of the book would suggest.

In quest of an appropriate term for civilization in Arabic, the Arab writers have experimented with several terminology, such as *madanīyah, haḍarah* and *tamaddun*. Ibn Khaldun's term *'umrān*, and 'Abduh's term *madanīyah* to signify civilization are not the current favourites. The terms haḍarah and tamaddun are found in modern Arabic usage as the alternative terms for civilization. Of the two terms, the word tamaddun is better qualified to express the concept of civilization in the modern sense.

NOTES

1. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (English tr. by F. Rosenthal), Princeton, 1967, i, Lxxvii (INTRODUCTION);
2. Glyn Daniel, *The first Civilizations: the archaeology of their origins*, London, 1968, 18;
3. The first English books on civilization were *The origins of Civilization* by John Labbock, published in 1870; and *Anthropology: an introduction to the study of Man and Civilization* by Edward Taylor, published in 1881;
4. J.R. Strayer et al, *The mainstream of civilization*, U.S.A., 1974, xxviii;
5. Darcy Riberio, *The civilizational process*, Washington, 1968, 19;

* It is understood that Jurji Zaydan's famous book on Islamic Civilization was influenced by the German Orientalist Von Kremer's book *Culturgeschichte des Orients*. According to E.A. Beylaev, "Under the direct influence of Kremer, and making wide use of his data, a book appeared in Arabic by Jirji (sic.) Zaydan, *Ta'rikh al-tamaddun al-islami* (History of Islamic Civilization), Part Four of which has been translated into English by D. Margoliouth." cf. E.A. Belyaev, *Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphate in the early Middle Ages*, (Translated from the Russian by Adolphe Gourevitch), London/Jerusalem, 1969, 193.

6. E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, i, 2155-56;
7. Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, Cairo, 1960, 211;
8. G.E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Essays in the nature and growth of a cultural tradition*, London, 1969, 209;
9. Lane, *op. cit.*, 589;
10. Charles C. Adams, *Islam and modernism in Egypt*, New York, 1968, 243;
11. Muhammad 'Abduh, *Tafsir al-Manar*, Cairo, 1374, iv, 429;
12. al-Farabi, *al-Siyasat al-Madaniyah*, ed. F.M. Najjar, Beirut, 1964, 9 (Preface)..
13. Jurji Zaydan, *Ta'rikh al-tamaddun al-Islami*, Beirut, n.d., See Introduction (*Muqaddimah*) to the 2nd edition:

NOTES ON
MODERN TERMS FOR CIVILIZATION
IN ISLAMIC LANGUAGES

The Arabs have coined three appropriate terms for civilization, viz., *'umrān, madaniyyah* and *tamaddun*. The first term for civilization (i.e., *'umran*) was coined by Ibn Khaldun, the father of the concept of civilization. It still exists in modern Arabic but its usage is a rarity. The Arabic word *hadarah* (in the dual sense of 'culture' and 'civilization') is popular among some Arab writers and historians, but it is totally disregarded by non-Arab Muslim intellectuals. The non-Arab Muslims have accepted only two Arabic terms (and their derivatives) for the concept of civilization, viz., *madaniyah* and *tamaddun*. For instance, the Persian intellectuals have coined two terms for civilization, namely, *madaniyat* and *tamaddon*. (cf. J.A. Boyle, *A practical dictionary of the Persian language*, London, 1949, 44 & 150; Ann K.S. Lambton, *Persian vocabulary*, Cambridge, 1961, 44 & 221). The Turks, on the other hand, use the term *medeniyet* (and also *medeniyeti*) in the meaning of civilization. (cf. H.C. Hony & Fahir Iz, *A Turkish-English dictionary*, London, 1947, 220). Almost all modern Turkish lexicographers accept *medeniyet* (derived from Arabic *madaniyah*) as their term for civilization. In East Africa, the speakers of the Swahili language have been using the term *Utamaduni* (derived from Arabic *tamaddun*) as the term for civilization. (cf. F. Johnson et al, *A standard Swahili-English dictionary*, London, 1939/1959, 448). In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh there is no universally accepted term for civilization. The speakers of Urdu and Bengali have been using two words (sometimes interchangeably) to express the sense of culture and civilization, viz., *tahzib* (*tahdhib*) and *tamaddun*. Some Pakistani Urdu lexicographers use the term *tahzib* in the dual sense of culture and civilization, but they restrict the use of *tamaddun* in the sense of civilization. (See Ferozsons *Urdu-English* and *English-Urdu* dictionaries). Bengali Muslim intellectuals have used the word *tamaddun* in the sense of "Culture". They also use the word *tahzib* in the sense of civilization. (cf. Shahid Ali, (editor), *Islami Sangskritir Rooprekha*, Dacca, 1967 & 1980, pages 42-43; 57; 65; 67; etc.). Thus the Bengali Muslim intellectuals have twisted the original sense of the Arabic word *tamaddun*. Such a semantic variation has not occurred in the usage of *tamaddun* in any other Muslim society. This is perhaps due to the fact that there is no direct contact between the Arab intellectuals and Bengali Muslim literati. On the other hand, the Malays of Malaysia and Indonesia unanimously use the word *tamaddun* (popularly spelt as *tamadun*) as the term for civilization. The Malays, like the Persians and the Turks, are surprisingly accurate in their choice and usage of the Arabic loan-word for civilization.

(— M.A.J. Beg)

TOWARDS
A DEFINITION
OF CIVILIZATION

Historians, archaeologists and anthropologists have contributed to our understanding of civilization. Of these three groups, the historians are the most qualified to study civilization. The anthropologists have defined the terms such as 'culture' and civilization. The archaeologists have literally dug out some hard facts of many lost civilizations of mankind throughout the world. They have helped historians to reconstruct the history of man's past. The antiques preserved in the museums are no less valuable than literary records in the study of civilization.

Modern scholars think of Culture as the genus, of which civilization is a species. Civilization is a species of society characterized by city life, architecture of great monuments and a system of 'visual records based on written notation'. The earliest civilizations emerged in the Tigris-Euphrates valley 5,000 years ago. In other words, the basic ingredients of civilization, viz., cities, monumental buildings and scripts of ancient languages were made by men five millennium ago. In the course of its evolution, a civilization produced, among other things, a Universal State and Higher form of religion.

Let us emphasize the basic ingredients of civilization one

6. E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, i, 2155-56;
7. Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, Cairo, 1960, 211;
8. G.E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Essays in the nature and growth of a cultural tradition*, London, 1969, 209;
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CHAPTER

2

TOWARDS
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Historians, archaeologists and anthropologists have contributed to our understanding of civilization. Of these three groups, the historians are the most qualified to study civilization. The anthropologists have defined the terms such as 'culture' and civilization. The archaeologists have literally dug out some hard facts of many lost civilizations of mankind throughout the world. They have helped historians to reconstruct the history of man's past. The antiques preserved in the museums are no less valuable than literary records in the study of civilization.

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Let us emphasize the basic ingredients of civilization one

by one. Some scholars assert the importance of *Writing* in the emergence of civilization. According to Edward Taylor, civilization began with writing[1]. H. Morgan also thought that at the end of barbarism, man invented writing and the alphabet, and thereby attained civilization[2]. Hence, we realize that "civilization cannot exist without a system of writing and a system of writing can not exist except in a civilization."[3]

Beatty and Johnson believe that city life and written records are the two essential requisites of a civilization.[4] Professor Clyde Kluckhohn thinks that 'a society to be civilized must have two of the following: towns upward 5,000 people, a written language and monumental ceremonial centres.'[5] Renfrew agrees with Kluckhohn and repeats the same theory in different words. He finds civilization as a three-dimentional culture. A Culture is raised to the plateau of civilization when it possesses "*Towns* indicating a considerable concentration of population, *Monumental buildings* such as temples or palaces, and *Writing*."[6] It follows from these definitions that two fundamental developments in human society raised *mankind* from primitive life to the height of civilization, viz. i) the rise of *cities*,* and ii) the invention of *scripts* as the medium of mental communication.

The foregoing definitions are formulated by historians and archaeologists. Now we shall turn to some definitions of literary type. Clive Bell, a modern writer, defines it as follows: "Civilization is a characteristic of societies."[7] The writer hastens to qualify his statement by saying that the characteristic which differentiates an advanced society from a backward society, is civilization. In the spirit of Clive Bell's theory, Redfield also thinks that civilization is

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* According to Toynbee, "The existence of cities is a criterion of civilization". On the other hand, Herbert Kuhn sees the hallmark of civilization "in the possession of cities, writing and trade".
Cf. Eric R. Wolf, Understanding civilizations: a review article, in *Comparative studies in society and History*, The Hague, ix, 1966-67, page 447.

"a characterizable way of life."[8] Similarly, Robert-Heine Geldern also arrives at the view that civilization is, in fact, "culture traits".[9] These vague definitions are less than satisfactory. Professor Redfield, however, makes himself a little more clear when he says, "*I think of civilization as one of the limited number of great peaks of culture or of human achievement shouldering itself upward, like a mountain among hills and plains.*"[10]

Riberio, an anthropologist, gives us an interesting definition of the subject. He thinks, "*Civilizations are the crystallizations of individual civilizational processes.*"[11]

The writer indicates in his book that there are almost a dozen civilizational processes at work in human society at different times of its evolution, e.g.,

i. 'spread of technology of plant domestication, destroying the nomadic hunting-and-gathering way of life and giving rise to a new sociocultural formation;

ii. 'animal domestication and functional specialization of some groups...................

iii., iv, & v. '*the Urban Revolution* corresponding to the rise of cities and states, to the stratification of societies into social classes, to the first experiments in irrigation agriculture, and to copper and bronze metallurgy, ideographic writing, numbers and the calendar, etc.

vi. Irrigation Revolution....................

vii. 'Metallurgical revolution leading to technological innovations like iron forging, manufacture of new tools, improvements of sailing vessels, invention of coinage, which facilitated external commerce, etc,

vii. Pastoral Revolution, ix. Mercantile Revolution, x. Technological revolution, xi. Industrial revolution, etc.

Of all these civilizational processes, the *Urban Revolution* is the most important one. The rise of cities and states comes about as a result of Urban Revolution. Cities radiate the light of civilization on surrounding areas, and offer men the best opportunities for their material and spiritual advancement.

The term 'urban revolution' needs some explanation in order to avoid any misconception about it. Among modern scholars, V. Gordon Childe is the main exponent of the concept of Urban revolution. He has outlined no less than 10 abstract criteria or prerequisities of urban revolution as follows: (i) an extensive and dense population; (ii) a well-organised society practising division of labour; (iii) surplus food production; (iv) construction of monumental public buildings by Kings or high priests; (v) social hierarchy or stratification; (vi) invention of script and spread of literacy; (vii) the attainment of elementary sciences of arithmetic, geometry and creation of calendar; (viii) the birth of pictorial and plastic arts; (ix) beginning of international commerce ("Regular 'foreign' trade over quite long distances was a feature of all early civilizations"); and (x) State organisation.[12] These ten factors were commonly found in the earliest known urban revolutions in Sumer, Egypt, Indus and Maya civilizations.

If we have to rely on Gordon Childe's explanation, we may have to assume that *Urban revolution is synonimous with civilization*. In other words, when an urban revolution takes place anywhere in the world, a new civilization is 'born'.

Wittfogel, the historian, gives us his illuminating definition of civilization as follows: "Following widespread practice, I employ civilization to refer particularly to the totality of cultural conditions — ideas and beliefs — of a given country."[13] Wittfogel does not refer to specific elements such as cities, or writing, or architecture in defin-

ing civilization. He overlooks the specific factors and sees it in general term as the "totality of cultural conditions". This type of definition has some merit no doubt, but his reference to a 'country' as a unit of civilization is a very narrow view of the subject. There were very few civilizations (in the ancient world) confined to the geographical limits of a single country, e.g., the Sumerian, the Egyptian and the Indus Valley civilizations. Moreover, the political boundary of a 'country' frequently changes in the course of its history. We find in history that a civilization stretches over vast territories comprising of many countries, e.g., the Archaemenid civilization, the Roman civilization, the Islamic civilization, and so forth. In spite of its initial merit, Wittfogel's concept of civilization is invalidated by parochialism.

Finally, we come to Toynbee's concept of civilization. Professor William McNeill, (a critic of Toynbee) argues that Toynbee "*never gives a systematic, careful definition of what the term 'civilization' means, but in later passages refers to it as a 'state of the soul'. Yet his criteria for recognizing separate civilizations are political, and as his book unfolds one discovers that the breakdowns of civilizations occur on the political plane also. .... in his first three volumes he sometimes gives the impression that the political framework is at least for all practical purposes identical with the civilization itself.*"[14]

Although Toynbee does not define the term 'civilization' in his magnum opus *A Study of History* (i-x volumes) as Professor McNeill rightly points out, Toynbee responded to this criticism in his abridged version of *A Study of History*. Toynbee subscribes to the definition that civilization is the "kind of culture found in cities."[15] He also shares the view with Frankfort that we recognize the character of a civilization in "a certain coherence among its various manifestations, a certain consistency in its orientation, a certain cultural 'style' which shapes its political and its judicial institutions, its art as well as its

literature, its religion as well as its morals.''[16]

In short, civilization comprises complex attainments of mankind such as city, script, art, architecture, religion, law and the political framework.

NOTES

1. Glyn Daniel, *The first civilizations: the archaeology of their origins*, London, 1968, 28;
2. *ibid.*, 29;
3. *ibid.*, 25;
4. J.H. Beatty and O.A. Johnson, *Heritage of western civilization*, New Jersey, 1963, 1-2;
5. Daniel, *op. cit.*, 25;
6. Colin Renfrew, *Before Civilization*, England, 1976, 212;
7. Clive Bell, *Civilization and old friends*, London/Chicago, 1973, 119;
8. Robert Redfield, ''Thinking about a civilization'' in *INTRODUCTION TO THE CIVILIZATION OF INDIA: CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF INDIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE*, Illinois, 1957, 2-3;
9. Rushton Coulborn, *The origins of civilized societies*, Princeton, 1959, 27;
10. Redfield, *op. cit.*, 8-9;
11. Darcy Riberio, *The civilizational process*, Washington, 1968, 19;
12. V. Gordon Childe, ''The Urban Revolution'' in *Urban man and society: A reader in urban sociology*, edited by Albert N. Cousins and Hans Nagpaul, New York, 1970, 10-15;
13. Karl A. Wittfogel, ''Ideas and the power structure'' in *Approaches to Asian civilizations*, Columbia University Press, 1966, 86;
14. William H. McNeill, ''Some basic assumptions of Toynbee's A Study of History'' in *The intent of Toynbee's History*, edited by E.T. Gargan, Chicago, 1961, 35-36;
15. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (revised and abridged by the author and Jane Caplan), London, 1972, 43;
16. *ibid.*, 46;

3

THE CONTENTS OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Arab writers have not given us a definition of civilization, except the Arabic terms for civilization such as *madaniyah, tamaddun, hadārah* and so forth. One could perhaps formulate the definition of civilization from the lexical meanings of these words. There is one way of deducing the implications of civilization in Arab minds by analyzing the contents of Arabic books on tamaddun, *hadārah* etc. Jurji Zaydan says that the real history of the Islamic Community (*Ummah*) is embedded in its civilization (*tamaddun*) and sedentary life (*hadārah*), and not in its wars and conquests[1]. Zaydan sees the futility of studying the wars of conquests launched by early Arab Muslim warriors. The early history of Islam is, indeed, the history of inspired Arabs as a conquering force who overran nations and tribes, and brought them under the government of the khilāfat. It is understandable that Zaydan prefers the history of civilization (*ta'rikh al-tamaddun*) to that of political history. Nevertheless, the wars of conquests do have significance in the breakdown of old civilizations and the birth of new civilization. As Bertrand Russell has rightly put it, ''*Conquest by force of arms has had more to do*

*with the spread of civilisation than any other single agen-
cy.''*[2)]

It seems that Bertrand Russell has overemphasized the
role of military conquests in the spread of the conquerors'
civilization in a foreign territory. In other words, he believ-
ed that the conquering armies easily transform a con-
quered society. The military mission becomes a civilizing
mission. This philosophical view has some truth, but it is
not entirely correct from a historian's point of view. When
a powerful army conquers a foreign territory, the con-
querors and the conquered usually work out a *modus
vivendi* of co-existence. If the colonial army happens to
stay in a new colony for a long period of time (say, fifty
years or a century), then cultural interactions occur be-
tween the colonials and the colonised. The response of the
conquered people to the conquerors decides the degree of
success or failure of cultural interaction between them. If
the civilization of the conquered people has strong founda-
tions, it becomes very difficult for the conquerors to im-
pose their civilization upon the people of the colony. A
modern scholar rightly says, ''Civilizations seem to be ex-
tremely tough and intricate structures; they do not alter
quickly and they are extremely difficult to destroy.''[(3)] On
the other hand, if the civilization of the conquered peoples
had been disintegrating before the conquest, then of course
the conquerors can easily impose their civilization upon the
vanquished people.

These hard facts of history are noted by Matthew Melko
as follows:

''Military conquest and occupation has not been suffi-
cient to transform civilizations. The Hellenistic invasion of
Persia did not transform the Iranian offshoot of
Mesopotamian civilization. It is true that India accepted
some Western ideas under British occupation, but so did
China and Russia without the benefit of Western conquest.
The Mongols occupying China bore little resemblance to
the Ilkhans of Southwest Asia. The failure of the con-

querors to impose cultural domination is not surprising.
When conquest takes place, the cultural advantages always
lie with the conquered. They are in their home territory,
living under their own customs. The conquerors must con-
tinue to govern their own lands and they have usually only
limited number of governors to spare. These must either
retain their ties to their own land, in which case they can-
not influence the conquered peoples, or they must dedicate
themselves to the conquered land, in which case they are
likely to absorb more of the culture of the conquered than
they impart. Anyone who has lived in another country, let
alone another civilization, knows how imperceptibly the
habits and customs of that country become one's own.''[(4)]

After this brief digression, let us return to the theme of
Arab/Islamic civilization as it is mirrored in some Arabic
books. Jurji Zaydan in his study of the History of Islamic
civilization (*Ta'rikh al-Tamaddun al-Islami*) focussed on
the following subjects:-

(i) *Islamic state* and government (including ad-
ministrative system),
(ii) *Islamic cities* including Basrah, Kufah, Fustat and
Baghdad,
(iii) *Social stratification (Niẓām al-ijtimā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-
nās)*,
(iv) *Science and learning* of the Arabs (*'Ulūm al-'Arab*),
(v) *Islamic buildings* (and architecture), and
(vi) *Islamic art*, especially music (*musiqa*) and singing
(*ghina'*).

Another Arab scholar, namely, Hasan Husni 'Abdul
Wahab produced one of the most illuminating Arabic
books on Islamic civilization in Ifriqiyah (Tunisia). Mr.
Abdul Wahab was born in the country of Ibn Khaldun's
birth. He seems to share some of the good qualities of his
illustrious predecessor as an historian. Hasan Husni's study
of Islamic civilization entitled *Waraqat 'an al-hadarat
al-'Arabiyah bi-Ifriqiyah al-Turnisid*[(5)] (Etudes sur certain
aspects de la civilization Arabe en Ifrikia (Tunisie) in two

volumes has no equal in modern Arabic language. The major subjects covered in this book are as follows:-

   (i) *Islamic cities*, e.g., Qayrawān, 'Abbāsīyah, Raqqādah and Susah;

   (ii) *Islamic buildings and architecture* with special reference to mosques, Ribat, etc.

   (iii) *Economic life*, especially commerce and Industry (*Tijārah wa'l-ṣinā'ah*

   (iv) *Ethnic composition of Urban population (sukkan al-mudun) (i.e. social stratification)*,

   (v) *Science and education* (with special reference to Astronomy, medicine etc. & Islamic studies),

   (vi) *Islamic art (e.g., music, singing and painting)*.

In comparison with the above competent studies, Professor Jamal al-Din al-Surur's sketch of "Islamic civilization in the Orient" (*Ta'rikh al-hadarah al-Islamiyah fi'l-Sharq*[6]) appears to be an amateur's incoherent effort at grasping Arab civilization. Mr. Surur in his study of *hadarah* concentrated on the following topics:-

   (i) Islamic states and governments (such as the 'Abbasid, Saffarid, Hamdanid, Buwayhid, etc)

   (ii) Economic conditions of the Middle East focussing on agriculture, trade and industry;

   (iii) Social life (including music and singing), and

   (iv) Intellectual developments in 'Iraq, Syria, Egypt, etc.

The contents of Islamic civilization, as we find them in some Arabic books, may be summed up as follows:-

   (i) Islamic State (or *Caliphate* and *Sultanate*),

   (ii) Islamic cities,

   (iii) Economic life of the Islamic society,

   (iv) Social stratification,

   (v) Islamic buildings and architecture, and

   (vi) Islamic Art (especially the popular art forms such as music, singing, painting and ceramics etc.).

Apart from Arab writers already mentioned, we like to analyze the contents of a non-Arabic book on civilization.

René Grousset studied "*The civilizations of the East*" in four volumes. His basic theme of study is *art* in the context of Oriental civilizations in the Near and Middle East, India, Japan and China. In the 1st volume of his book Grousset gave a glimpse of Arab civilization. He divides Arab civilization into two, viz., a) Umayyad civilization, and b) 'Abbasid civilization. Grousset touched upon four topics of Umayyad civilization[7]:

i) Umayyad State, ii) Umayyad capital city of Damascus, iii) Umayyad architecture, and iv) Umayyad art such as Kufic script, mosaics, etc. M. Grousset has something interesting to say on Umayyad civilization. He says, "*The civilization of Omayyad Syria became more and more brilliant everyday. It seemed as though the Moslem revolution had taken place merely in order to turn Damascus into the capital of the East, when Omayyad dynasty was swept away by a revolt starting in Persia, and with it the Syrian hegemony of Islam.*"[8]

On the other hand, René Grousset discussed the 'Abbasid civilization[9] in greater detail and included the following aspects:

  (a) Abbasid state,

  (b) The capital city of Baghdad,

  (c) Economic developments in Abbasid era,

  (d) Intellectual trends of Abbasid times,

  (e) Abbasid Islamic Art including ceramics and painting,

  (f) Abbasid architecture and monuments.

Grousset's appreciation of Abbasid civilization is reflected in the following comments:

"*The Abbasid Empire was the seat of a rich material civilization.*"[10]

"*The age of the first Abbasids marks the highest point of Arab, or rather, Arabo-Persian, civilization. The personal merit of the sovereigns had a great deal to do with this flourishing state of affairs.*"[11]

NOTES

1. J. Zaydan, *Ta'rikh al-tamaddun al-Islami*, (See Introduction to the first edition);
2. Bertrand Russell, *POWER: a new social analysis*, London, 1975, 28;
3. Matthew Melko, *The interaction of civilizations: an essay*, in *Journal of world history*, (*Cahiers d'histoire Mondiale*), vol. xi, no. 4, 1969, 573;
4. *ibid.*, 571;
5. H.H. Abdul-Wahab, *Waraqat* (Etudes sur certains aspects de la civilisation arabe en Ifrikia), 2 vols, Tunis, 1965 and 1966;
6. Jamal al-Din al-Surur, *Ta'rikh al-hadarah al-Islamiyah fi'l-Sharq*, Cairo, 1384/1965;
7. René Grousset, *The civilizations of the East*, vol. i (The Near and Middle East), translated from the French by C.A. Philips, New York, 1967, 172-184;
8. *ibid.*, 184;
9. *ibid.*, 185-210;
10. René Grousset, *The Civilizations of the East* (*Les civilisations de L'Orient*) (vol. i, The Near and Middle East), New York, 1967, 193-194;

"The 'Abbasid Empire was the seat of a rich material civilization. The mass of Arab tales which give us a picture of the society of those times is constantly referring to the fabulous wealth of Baghdad and the other great cities of 'Iraq. In the bazaars of the 'Abbasid capital were amassed all the products of the East. The caravans of Iran brought to them the carpets of Samarqand, the raw silk of Mazandran, the silken fabrics of Marv and Nishapur, the velvets of Tus and Shushtar, the turquoises and lapis lazuli of Khorasan and what is now Afghanistan, and the ceramic ware of Raiy, besides the sugar-cane and confectionary of Makran, the fine wines and essences of Shiraz, Yazd and Isfahan. The caravans from Mesopotamia, Syria and Africa brought Arabian incense, 'damascened armour', goldsmiths' work, fine harnesswork, rich carpets, and gold brocades from Aleppo and Damascus, muslins from Mosul, the many-coloured glass-ware of Tyre and Beyrut, the wood-carving, ivory boxes, perfume-burners and earthenware of al-Fustat (Cairo). The Arab ships which plied on the Persian Gulf between Basra and the ports of the Malabar coast, touching at Siraf and Muscat, brought back to 'Iraq the spices of the Malay Archipelago, the pearls of Ceylon, the precious woods, cotton fabrics and cinnamon of India, and the musks of Tibet, as well as the silks and satins of China."

11. *ibid.*, 191-192.

CHAPTER

4

IBN KHALDUN'S STUDY OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Arab historians, writers, scientists and poets of the classical period have produced a rich harvest of Arabic literature which gives a vivid impression of Islamic civilization. Besides, modern archaeological findings in Muslim countries also have added new materials to our knowledge of Middle Eastern and North African Islamic civilization. Literary and archaeological sources aside, we are fortunate to have the study of Islamic civilization by the great Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun.

Ibn Khaldun's book *al-Muqaddimah li-kitab al-'ibar*[1] alone, more than any other book, gives the earliest analysis of Islamic civilization. He was a versatile scholar who had profound understanding of the realities of Islamic societies of North Africa, Spain and the Middle East. Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah has no precedent either in Islamic literature or in the literatures of the world.

His book is divided in six chapters, each chapter explaining one or more aspects of Islamic civilization. The chapter arrangement of the book is as follows:-

1. *Introduction to civilization in general;*
2. *A Study of Bedouin Life;*
3. *The State and its administrative system;*
4. *The cities: their origin and growth;*
5. *Economic life with special reference to crafts, professions and commerce; and*
6. *Science and learning, e.g., arithmetic, Algebra and geometry, alchemy and medicine, as well as poetry and Islamic subjects.*

Ibn Khaldun's view on the birth of a civilization is as follows: *"As soon as some kind of social organisation is formed, civilization (عُمْرَان 'umrān) results. The Arabic word, derived from a root which means 'to build, to develop' is also used by Ibn Khaldun in the further sense of 'population'. When a social organisation grows more populous, a larger and better 'umrān results. This growth in numbers, with a corresponding growth in civilization, finally culminates in the highest form of sedentary culture man is able to achieve."*[2]

Ibn Khaldun discussed the origin of the state and assigned an important role to religion in this respect. He also gave a résumé of important officials of the Islamic state such as *mufti, qādī* (judge), *muhtasib* (a municipal official who performed the functions of a market inspector and censor of public morals), wazir (minister), *hājib*, tax collectors, etc. The functions of the state in respect of minting coins, manufacture of royal robes in *tirāz* factories, and the admiralty are also highlighted. Ibn Khaldun warns his readers that two unjust acts contribute to the fall of the state, and the decline of civilization, viz., i) imposition of forced labour (*sukhrīyah*) upon the subjects, and ii) misappropriation of private property. In other words, Ibn Khaldun sees justice as the veritable basis of civilization.

The study of cities forms one of the most important parts of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*. He realizes that cities are founded by royal authorities. The cities are the

bastions of power of the state. Therefore, cities must be properly planned in order to improve the life of the city-dwellers and for the permanence of the cities. The following factors must be taken into consideration in founding cities:-

(i) Clear air (which is necessary for public health);
(ii) perennial water supply for the inhabitants of the city should be assured; cities should preferably be located by the river or sea;
(iii) The hinterland of the city must ensure necessary food supply for the urban population; hence the city should have fertile land in its outskirts;
(iv) The city should also be located near forests for steady supply of wood for fuel and buildings;
(v) Pasture land should also be near the city for fodder of animals.[3]

He points out that Arab city-planners ignored some of the basic factors at the time of founding of cities such as Kufah, Basrah, and Qayrawan. The locales of these cities were not on natural sites. As a result, these cities endured hardships and could not be the centres for a durable civilization.

Ibn Khaldun's thought on the prerequisites of a city has drawn admiration from Saba George Shiber, an Arab architect and city-planner. In his rhetorical outburst Shiber comments, "Ibn Khaldun grasped the multifarious components contingent on city building, and expressed himself about them eloquently, succinctly, clearly and strongly. To him, the city was people and buildings, governance and engineering, culture and architecture, administration and economics. It was not a static, two or even three dimentional organism but, rather, a multi-dimentional organism with the elements of time and philosophy added to boot."[4]

Shiber finds Ibn Khaldun's ideas of town planning very

original and he cites the very text we have summarised above. He says, "Speaking like a seasoned scientist he (Ibn Khaldun) states:

"In connection with the protection of towns against harm that might arise from atmospheric phenomena, one should see to it that the air where the town is (to be situated) is good, in order to be safe from illness. When the air is stagnant and bad, or close to corrupt waters or putrid pools or swamps, it is speedily affected by putrescence as the result of being near these things, and it is unavoidable that (all) living beings who are there will speedily be affected by illness."* Such a statement could very well have been culled from a report of a WHO or FAO environmental or sanitation expert, or from a public health officer's report.

Ibn Khaldun goes further into detailed considerations about the 'raison d'etre' of a town. The following quotation is considered so important, as to be fit to serve as a primer in the fundamentals of site selection for towns.

"In connection with the importation of useful things and conveniences into towns, one must see to a number of matters. There is the water (problem). The place should be on a river; or springs with plenty of fresh water should be facing it. The existence of water near the place simplifies the water problem for the inhabitants, which is urgent. The existence of (water) will be a great convenience to them.

"Another utility in towns, for which one must provide, is good pastures for the livestock (of the inhabitants). Each householder needs domestic animals for breeding, for milk and for riding. (These animals) require pasturage. If (the pastures) are nearby and good, that will be more conve-

* Saba George Shiber freely quoted from Professor Rosenthal's English translation of the *Muqaddimah* without acknowledgement. For instance, the above excerpt and the following quotations are found in *The Muqaddimah*, vol., ii, pp. 244 and 246-248.

nient for them, because it is troublesome for them to have the pastures faraway. Furthermore, one has to see to it that there are fields suitable for cultivation. Grain is the (basic) food. When fields are near, the (needed) grain can be obtained more easily and quickly.

"One should also see to it that the town is situated close to the sea, to facilitate the importation of foreign goods from remote countries. However, this is not on the same level with the aforementioned (requirements). All the (requirements) mentioned differ in importance according to the different needs and the necessity that exist for them on the part of the inhabitants.

"The founder (of a town) sometimes fails to make a good natural selection, or he sees only to what seems most important to him or his people and does not think of the needs of others. The Arabs did that at the beginning of Islam when they founded towns in the Iraq, the Hijaz and Ifriqiyah ...

"In connection with coastal towns situated on the sea, one must see to it that they are situated on a mountain or amidst people sufficiently numerous to come to the support of the town when an enemy attacks it .... (Its exposed situation) probably was the reason why Alexandria and Tripoli were attacked by the enemy in Islamic times on numerous occasions."[5]

The above text (quoted from the great *Muqaddimah*) which was so extravagantly admired by Saba George Shiber, was not an original contribution of Ibn Khaldun to Islamic town planning. Similar ideas have been circulating in early Islamic societies for many centuries. We have literary evidence to substantiate this claim. For instance, Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. 414 H./1023 A.D.), a well-known Islamic scholar and literary genius of the Abbasid period, recorded the following:

"Some wisemen (ḥukamā') said: 'Cities should be built

(at a site) near to (the natural supply of) *water, pasturage, woodlands* and *fortification*.'[6]

The first three requirements of a site suitable for city-building mentioned by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi were also recommended by Ibn Khaldun three centuries later. Similarly, Ibn Abi Zar' (d. between 710 and 720 A.H./1310-1320 A.D.)[7] also wrote a similar idea about the proper location for founding an Islamic city. He was a resident of the city of Fa's (Fez) and wrote a book on the history of Morocco, entitled *"Al-Anis al-mutrib bi-rawd al-qirtas fi-akhbar muluk al-Maghrib wa-ta'rikh madinat Fa's* (otherwise known as *Rawd al-qirtas*). This north African historian Ibn Abi Zar' wrote as follows:

"The wisemen said: 'the best location for cities are those which combine five things, namely, ever-flowing *water* (i.e., river or sea), good *agricultural lands, forest* (for supply of wood) at a nearby place, *walled fortress* and the seat of the *sultan* (ruler)..'"[8].

This text of Ibn Abi Zar' gives in greater detail the basic requirements for the foundation of Islamic cities. Out of the five points noted by Ibn Abi Zar', three were at least included in Ibn Khaldun's writing.

On the whole, writings on an ideal site for founding an Islamic city began to appear in Islamic society as early as the 11th century A.D. or even earlier in the eastern lands of the Abbasid Khilafat. The North African predecessor of Ibn Khaldun to write on the site for an Islamic city was Ibn Abi Zar', who wrote more than half a century earlier than the Tunisian great historian. Thus the idea of Islamic town-planning germinated at least three centuries before Ibn Khaldun and it was repeated more elaborately one generation earlier than the author of the *Muqaddimah*. Thus it seems fairly certain that the idea of Islamic town planning had a long period of evolution before Ibn Khaldun wrote and elaborated it. It was not an original

idea of the North African historian as some modern scholars thought.

Ibn Khaldun discussed "urban life as the most developed form of human association and civilization."[9] He also devoted much space to "higher civilization, to commerce, the crafts, and the sciences, considered both as conditions and consequences of urban life and as such, indispensable for the understanding of history."[10] Throughout his discourse on city Ibn Khaldun referred to civilization. Thus city life and civilization were inseparable in his historical thought.

Human society was divided into two distinct forms of social organisation, namely, sedentary life (*haḍārah*) and desert life (*badāwah*) which stood against each other. The distinction between "city" and "desert" was not a "qualitative" one but a "sociological" one amounting to "quantitative" difference as to the "size and density of human settlements".

Ibn Khaldun rightly thought that a city was usually founded by a state and a dynasty. The size of the population within a state determined the size of its civilization (*'umrān*). As the state flourished, so did its civilization. In a developing state, various crafts including architecture and sciences flourished and luxurious living was the result. "The goal of civilization", says Ibn Khaldun, "is sedentary culture and luxury."[11]

The foundation, growth and decline of a city (*madīnah*) was closely linked with the political fortune of its founders, (i.e., the state and the dynasty). Sometimes a city fell to ruins with the fall of its founders. Some cities like Baghdad experienced continuous growth and expansion because of the long history of its founders. In other instances, cities like Fez and Cairo experienced urban renewal after a period of decline when it was chosen by a new dynasty as its seat of government. Ibn Khaldun looked

at the city as an "organism" which had its growth, development and decline. The life cycle of a city goes on until it produces luxury and urban culture (i.e., civilization) to its fullest extent. After attaining its sedentary culture, city life tends to slide downward. In its declining years, corruption raises its ugly head and plagues the urban life. Consequently, there is decline in "religion" and public "morality". When sedentary culture reaches such a squalid condition, the civilization of the city ceases to grow and falls to ruin. Ibn Khaldun was the only Muslim scholar who discussed Islamic city from the point of view of an historian and a sociologist.

Ibn Khaldun's study of city and architecture seems to go together. He says, *"Architecture is (also) needed when rulers and people of a dynasty build large towns and high monuments. They try their utmost to make good plans and build tall structures with technical perfection, so that architecture can reach its highest development."*[12]

Ibn Khaldun studies architecture as a subject of great importance. He repeatedly discusses the subject of architecture in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of his book *al-Muqaddimah li-kitab al-ʿibar*. Architecture features in the study of dynasties and states; it also appears in the study of cities. Finally, architecture is also discussed, in theoretical manner, in the chapter on crafts and professions. No Islamic scholar has paid so much attention to the subject of architecture (ṣināʿat al-bināʾ) before Ibn Khaldun. The art of building is a subject of great importance in Ibn Khaldun's thought on civilization. He realizes that architecture typifies a civilization.

Ibn Khaldun's view on the great importance of architecture is epitomized in the following words, "Building/architecture (bināʾ) is the foundation of civilization (ʿumrān)".[13]

A sedentary civilization produces many arts and crafts

such as architecture, calligraphy, music, textiles, tailoring, carpentry and so forth. It also possesses various sciences such as medicine, astronomy, chemistry, physics, optics and the like. Ibn Khaldun in his own terminology includes all these arts, crafts and sciences among "crafts". When a civilization grows by leaps and bounds, it causes proliferation of crafts.

Architecture is the craft which is needed for construction of houses and mansions for cover and shelter.[14] It is also an *urban craft* which produces "vast constructions and large buildings" set up for the generality of the public and not for a privileged few[15]. The Arab historian tells us that architecture flourishes most during the middle period of a state and dynasty. According to Ibn Khaldun, a state passes through five stages of growth. At first, the people of a dynasty establishes itself by eliminating a ruling authority. At the second stage, a dynasty (state) consolidates its power. At the third stage of its growth, the state attains 'leisure and tranquility' and acquires "property, monuments and fame". It is a favourable period for the construction of "large buildings, spacious cities and large monuments."[16] At the fourth stage, the state and society enjoy peace and contentment and maintain the status quo. At the fifth and final stage, there is mismanagement of the public finance and political decline. Consequently, the state weakens and collapses. It follows from Ibn Khaldun's thesis that the era of construction of great monuments and fine architecture is the period of economic prosperity and political stability in a civilized society.

The great monuments of civilization are the expression of political power (royal authority). The greater the power of the state, the higher and monumental is its architecture. In Ibn Khaldun's words, "The monuments of a dynasty are its buildings and large (edifices, *haykal*). They are proportionate to the original power of the dynasty. They can materialize only when there are many workers and united action and co-operation.[17]" A great ruling

power can mobilize a large work force and build "the largest monuments". Ibn Khaldun illustrates his point by referring to the great buildings of antiquity such as those of the 'Ad and the Thamud and the *Iwān Kisrá* of the ancient Persians. Similar were the famous Islamic monuments such as the Umayyad mosques at Damascus and Cordoba, the monuments of Cherchel in the Maghrib, and the Pyramids of Egypt[18]. All these great monuments were possible through engineering skill and superb craftsmanship.

Men and machines combined their skill and strength to construct great monuments. Some of the contemporaries of Ibn Khaldun attributed the great monuments to the large body of the ancient men. But the historian informs his readers that the ancients had no bigger bodies than modern men. What they had were the engineering skill and high technology. They had the use of machines to transport "building materials" from a distant place to the building sites. This is how the ancient nations managed to build great monuments like the *Iwān Kisrá* as well as the Fatimid buildings (at Mahdīyah) in Ifriqiyah, and the Sinhaja buildings like Qal'at Bani Hammad and the Aghlabid great masjid in the city of Qayrawan[19].

Ibn Khaldun also says that some major architectural projects of the ancient Middle East were built by the efforts of successive generations of builders of different dynasties. This was necessitated by the enormity of the projects which were beyond the ability of a single builder to complete. The example of this is the great Dam of the Ma'rib whose construction was inaugurated by Saba' bin Yashjub but completed by the Himyar rulers[20]. The construction of the monuments of the city of Carthage was believed to have a similar history.

Some monuments of architecture were so enormous that they cannot be easily destroyed. For instance, Khalifah Harun al-Rashid tried to pull down the *Iwān Kisrá* (Great

audience Hall of Khusraw) but he failed. Similarly, Khalifah al-Ma'mun tried to destroy some of the Pyramids of Egypt but his efforts also met with failure[21].

The demolition of old monuments and the reuse of its building material for the construction of new buildings was not unusual in the ancient world. This probably explains why some of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs tried to demolish some ancient buildings. This action was not due to the vanity of the great rulers but it was intended for practical architectural necessity.

Ibn Khaldun's interest in Islamic architecture led him to discuss ancient buildings as a means of making his points.

The founder of the *'ilm al-'umrān*, Ibn Khaldun did not spare the Arabs from his criticism. He says that the buildings of the Arabs were not solidly built. This was so due to the nomadic background of the Arabs and their ignorance of the craft of building/architecture. They were bad city planners and incompetent builders[22]. This is why many Arab monuments quickly fell to ruins.

Sometimes the Arabs depended on hired foreign workers and craftsmen to construct some of their monuments. Ibn Khaldun cites some instances to establish his point. For instance, the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid bin 'Abd al-Malik imported skilled workmen from Byzantium to construct the Umayyad mosque at Damascus and also to re-build the Masjid al-Nabawi at Madinah.[23] All these factors, of course, contributed to the formation of early Islamic architecture.

Alongside the architects and the builders, the carpenters were also an important group of craftsmen. The carpenters' craft was in demand in a civilization. They made elegant types of "roofs and doors" in buildings as well as chairs and furniture[24]. These craftsmen were familiar with the principles of geometry to fashion their

products in symmetrical arrangements.

The North African historian also tells us that some professions and crafts exist only in a prosperous urban society, e.g., the craft of painters, goldsmiths, calligraphers and copyists of books etc. When urban life declines and civilization recedes, these crafts also vanish from society[25].

Ibn Khaldun appreciated the art of music and singing (ghinā') as well as calligraphy and writing (al-khatt wa'l-kitābah). He describes music as the art of the urban people. It originated in pre-Islamic societies. The non-Arab rulers patronized it. Muslim Arabs ignored this art in early days of Islam. They preferred recitation of al-Qur'an and Arabic poetry to music. But after the Arabs had conquered the Byzantine and Sassanid territories, the singers of these areas came to entertain the Arabs. In other words, contacts between the Arabs and non-Arabs within the newly created Islamic Empire led to the acculturation of the Arabs. They gradually acquired the taste for music. The Arabs perfected the art of music during the 'Abbasid period. The art of music appears in a society with the emergence of civilization, and it tends to disappear from society when civilization retrogresses.[26]

Ibn Khaldun discusses writing (kitābah)[27] The art of writing distinguishes men from beasts. He finds writing as a means of transmission of knowledge and science. He says, "........ Writing is the most useful craft, because in contrasts with other crafts it deals with matters of theoretical, scientific interest." The standard of excellence of calligraphy in a city corresponds to the level of its civilization.

Ibn Khaldun viewed calligraphy as an urban art. It flourished in many early Islamic cities such as Basrah, Kufah, Baghdad, Qayrawan and Cairo.[28]. The Kufic script of Kufah was very famous, so also the Baghdadi

script. Baghdad had great civilization and it had great master calligraphers like Ibn Muqlah, Ibn al-Bawwab and Yaqut al-Musta'simi[29].

Ibn Khaldun has some interesting ideas about calligraphy. He says, "Writing is an urban craft that serves to make a living."[30] He further adds, ".. We find that instruction in handwriting in cities is more proficient, easier, and methodically better (than elsewhere) because the coloring (sic.) (of the craft of writing) is firmly established in them. Thus, we are told about contemporary* Cairo (Egypt) that there are teachers there who are specialized in the teaching of calligraphy."[31]

We have discussed earlier that the emergence of the art of writing in a society symbolizes the emergence of civilization. Judging by the high standard of Islamic calligraphy we can say that Islamic civilization attained very high level of development by 10th century A.D.

Ibn Khaldun also discusses sciences which flourished in Islamic civilization, especially astronomy and astrology, arithmetic, alegbra and geometry, along with medicine, optics and alchemy. The scientific subjects are discussed in the 5th and 6th chapters of al-Muqaddimah-li-Kitab al-'ibar.

Ibn Khaldun is known to us as an historian and a sociologist. But the nature of his work al-Muqaddimah li-kitab al-'ibar does not strictly conform to either chronological history or modern sociology. Hence some scholars regard Ibn Khaldun's book as a new science, 'ilm al -'umrān (science of civilization), and as the founder of this new science he deserves to be called a civilizationist or interpreter of civilization. Ibn Khaldun wrote his magnum opus, the Muqaddimah, in the year 779 A.H./1377 A.D. Whatever we may call him, his greatness as a scholar is not

* 14th century Cairo.

in question. Some scholars recently claimed Ibn Khaldun as an economist and went so far as to proclaim him as "medieval Islam's greatest economist"[32]. This last epithet may seem rather exaggerated but we can at least examine the validity of such statement.

We like to discuss Joseph Spengler's research entitled "*Economic thought of Islam : Ibn Khaldun*". It gives us an entirely new perspective of Ibn Khaldun's trend of thought. Therefore, it deserves our serious consideration.

According to Spengler, Ibn Khaldun's "economic observations flowed from his concern with the rise and fall of ruling dynasties (or the 'states' they constituted) and with the role of crafts, together with their acquisition and their correlation with the level of civilization or culture."[33] The economic factors which had a direct bearing on Islamic civilization were briefly discussed in the *Muqaddimah*. Indeed, in chapter IV of the Prolegomena (or Muqaddimah) there are some interesting sections pertaining to economic topics such as Taxation and the reason for low and high revenues; Customs duties; Accumulation of estates and farms; Prices in towns; Commercial activities of the rulers; (Economic) injustice as the cause of the destruction of civilization, etc.

Here are some brief notes on Ibn Khaldun's economic concepts as discussed in the Prolegomena:

(1) *Population and its economic implication:*
     When a state or dynasty (Ar., *dawlah*) comes into existence, it builds cities. As the state flourishes, luxury and prosperity also increase in sedentary society. The availability of abundant food and prospect of good income attract rural population to migrate to cities. Population growth is caused both by high birth-rate and flow of immigration. The increase of population in cities means supply of great many workers and proliferation of crafts (i.e.,

small as well as big industries) which contribute to economic progress. When the rulers suffer political reverses, the economy retrogresses. This, in turn, affects the economic life of the people adversely.

(2) *Demand, supply and prices:*
     Ibn Khaldun's ideas of these economic forces were as follows:

(a) Demand rather than supply determined the wages of workers.

(b) The demand for luxury goods tended to be inelastic, although such goods were 'in short supply'.

(c) The prices of goods and services in advanced urban societies were higher in comparison with those of less developed urban settlements.

(3) *Profit-making:*
     (a) Profit-motive was necessary for private enterprises and this contributed to economic growth. (b) There was an element of gambling in commerce and trickery was used by traders to maximise their profit. But there should be only small profit on invested capital. (c) Low prices adversely affect commercial activities and diminish profit.

(4) *Rank, servile mentality and profit:*
     A man of high rank, with royal connections, had greater chance of earning profit than those without such status. The *amirs* (literally, princes or governors) used to confiscate property from those who accumulated it. But a man of high rank was exempt from such intimidation. Moreover, a high-ranking person could extract money from those who needed protection from harm. (*Muqaddimah*, ii, 326-32)

(5) *Surplus:*
     Analyzing Ibn Khaldun's views on "surplus of

products'', Spengler says, ''A surplus emerges with the progress of civilization and permits the consumption and importation of non-necessities, together with capital formation, population growth, and possibly a further enlargement of the surplus in consequence of population growth.''[34]

(6) *Expenditure:*

According to Ibn Khaldun, income and expenditure were normally balanced at all levels. In his words, ''Income and expenditure balance each other in every city. If the income is large, the expenditure is large, and vice versa.''[35] (Balanced budgeting was the norm in Islamic states). Only when a state becomes 'sick', the rulers squander away money on worthless things.[36]

Ibn Khaldun referred to economic matters in order to explain the rise and fall of states, and the growth or decline of urban life. He realized that the economic factors played a part in the progress or retrogression of civilization. Hence, he discussed commerce, division of labour and the taxation system. It is difficult to derive theoretical conclusions from his sparse notes on Islamic economy. No Muslim economist analyzed the economic affairs of the state as thoroughly as Ibn Khaldun. Irrespective of their theoretical merit, the economic data in the *Muqaddimah* are essential for an understanding of the economic history of the Islamic nations of the classical and post-classical period.

NOTES

1. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah al-'Allamah Ibn Khaldun li-kitab al-'ibar*, (with marginal notes on the author's biography), Cairo, 1322/1904;
2. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history*, (Translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal and abridged by N.J. Dawood), London, 1967, x-xi;
3. Sāti' al-Ḥuṣarī, *Dirāsāt 'an al-Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*,

Beirut, 1967, 525-531;
4. Saba George Shiber, Ibn Khaldun on City planning, in *EKISTICS*, vol. xxix (1970), 289; and S.G. Shiber, *The Kuwait urbanization*, Government Printing Press, Kuwait, 1964, 22;
5. Idem, *The Kuwait urbanization*, p. 23;
6. Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, *al-Imta' wa'l-mu'anasah*, Cairo, 1966, ii, 27;
7. H.R. Idris, Ibn Abi Zar' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, iii, 694-95;
8. Syed 'Abd al-'Aziz Sālim, *Al-Maghrib al-Kabir* (al-'asr al-Islami), Egypt, 1966, 527;
9. Franz Rosenthal, *Introduction to the Muqaddimah*, Lxx;
10. *ibid.*, Lxx;
11. F. Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, ii, 296;
12. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, (English tr., abridged), 279;
13. Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, Cairo, 1322/1904, 83;
14. idem, *The Muqaddimah* (English tr.), ii, 357;
15. *ibid.*, ii, 235;
16. *ibid.*, i, 353-355;
17. *ibid.*, i, 356;
18. *ibid.*, i, 357;
19. *ibid.*, ii, 238-240;
20. *ibid.*, 241;
21. *ibid.*, 242-243;
22. *ibid.*, 269-70 and 350;
23. *ibid.*, 362-363;
24. *ibid.*, ii, 363-66;
25. *ibid.*, 352;
26. *ibid.*, 395-405;
27. *ibid.*, 384-87;
28. *ibid.*, 384-86; See also M.A.J. Beg, *Two lectures on Islamic civilization*, Kuala Lumpur, 1982, 13-15;
29. *ibid.*, 385;
30. *ibid.*, ii, 383;
31. *ibid.*, 378;
32. J.J. Spengler, Economic thought of Islam : Ibn Khaldun, in *Comparative Studies in society and history*, The Hague, 1963-64, vol. vi, 268;
33. *ibid.*, 269;
34. *ibid.*, 302;
35. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (English tr.,) ii, 275;
36. *ibid.*, i, 355.

A note on
ABU'L-FAZL AND IBN KHALDUN CONCERNING ARCHITECTURE

The North African historian Ibn Khaldun formulated the theory that architecture was an expression of the royal power. The monuments built by a dynasty were proportionate to its power. This follows that a great dynasty builds great monuments. This viewpoint is corroborated by Abu'l-Fazl, the court historian of Mughal Emperor Akbar, the Great (d.1605 A.D.) of Hindustan. Abu'l-Fazl also thought of cities as the centres of progress (of civilization). The Mughal dynasty of India is well-known for the grandeur of its architecture. Abu'l-Fazl in his *A'in-i Akbari* portrayed the Emperor as the cause of architectural development. He wrote,

"Regulations for house-building in general are necessary; they are required for the comfort of the army, and are a source of splendour for the Government. People that are attached to the world will collect in towns, without which there would be no progress. Hence His Majesty plans splendid edifices, and dresses the work of his mind and heart in the garment of stone and clay. Thus mighty fortresses have been raised, which protect the timid, frighten the rebellious, and please the obedient. Delightful villas and imposing towers have also been built. They afford excellent protection against cold and rain, provide for the comforts of the princesses of the Harem, and are conducive to that dignity which is so necessary for worldly power'.

"Everywhere also *sara'is* have been built, which are the comfort of travellers and the asylum of poor strangers. Many tanks and wells are being dug for the benefit of men and the improvement of the soil. Schools and places of worship are being founded, and the triumphal arch of knowledge is newly adorned.

His Majesty has enquired into every detail connected with this department, which is so difficult to be managed, and requires such large sums." (The *A'in-i Akbari* by Abu'l-Fazl, translated by Blochmann, i,232).

Although Abu'l-Fazl's stature was not as high as that of Ibn Khaldun, he was a great historian of Mughal India. His writing on buildings/architecture was as important in India as Ibn Khaldun's writing on *ṣinā'at al-binā'* was unique in the Arab world.

CHAPTER

5

IBN KHALDUN AND TOYNBEE: MASTER MINDS OF CIVILIZATION STUDIES

The concept of civilization originated in Islamic scholarship. Ibn Khaldun formulated it 600 years ago. The Indian and Chinese civilizations failed to conceive of the idea of civilization[1]. Therefore, we have only two concepts of civilization in the world, the earlier of them is the Islamic concept of civilization, and the latest is the Western concept of civilization. The European scholars began to have visions of civilization not earlier than 18th century A.D. — four centuries after Ibn Khaldun. Arnold Toynbee was the most famous Western interpreter of civilization.

"Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth century Arab," writes Feibleman, *"was the first man so far as we know to have the idea of comparative civilizations. His thoughts on the topic were very advanced for the time, and anticipates much later work."*[2]

Toynbee also recognizes the genius of Ibn Khaldun and finds him to be *"the most illuminating interpreter of the morphology of history that has appeared anywhere in the*

world so far.'[3] At the same time, Toynbee points out that Ibn Khaldun's knowledge of "non-Islamic civilizations, contemporary or antecedent, was dim." In spite of this alleged failing, Toynbee concedes that Ibn Khaldun arrived at "*illuminating* general conclusions about the relation between politics and religion." Toynbee appraises Ibn Khaldun's scholarship by the adjective "illuminating" and also emphasizes that Ibn Khaldun was "the outstanding genius in the field of the study of morphology of history." One paragraph after this statement Toynbee also says that Ibn Khaldun had "Islamic civilization — at his command." Thanks to Professor Rosenthal's translation of *The Muqaddimah* into English, Ibn Khaldun's analysis of Islamic civilization is now appreciated in all the continents of the world.

On the other hand, the Late Professor Toynbee wrote on 21 civilizations of mankind in his *A Study of History* (which is based on the works of historians as well as archaeologists and Orientalists "during the preceding 130 years."). British historians underestimate Toynbee's survey of civilizations, whereas the American Alfred Kroeber paid him the highest tribute: "*Toynbee is not only a trained historian but the only historian in the group of the pluralistic interpreters of civilizations.*"[4] Academic scholars of U.S. Universities have appreciated the works of Ibn Khaldun and Toynbee. America today is ahead of Europe in propagating the ideas of civilization.

Ibn Khaldun's and Toynbee's ideas meet at some points. Both historians regard food production[5] as a pre-requisite of civilized life. Like Ibn Khaldun, Toynbee also recognized the importance of city[6] architecture[7] and technology[6] as some of the basic aspects of civilization.

NOTES

1. James K. Feibleman, *Understanding civilizations*, New

York, 1975, 82;

2. ibid., 68;

3. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of history*, (abridged by Jane Caplan in collaboration with the author), London, 1972, 489;

4. Alfred Kroeber, *An anthropologist looks at history*, California, 1963, 82;

5. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, (English translation by F. Rosenthal), ii, 357; Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 51;

6. Sāti' al-Husari, *Dirasat 'an al-Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun*, Cairo/Beirut, 1387/1967, 523-531; cf. also Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 302-307;

7. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on trial*, London, 1948, 222; cf. also *Muqaddimah* (tr.), ii, 357-63;

8. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (abridged), p.51; Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (Tr.), ii, 363.

CHAPTER

6

TOYNBEE'S INTERPRETATION OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION:

Professor Toynbee's interpretation of Islamic civilization is a controversial topic. His views on the subject are not shared even by Western historians. The Orientalists did not welcome it. Muslim scholars ignored it so far. However, we cannot overlook it altogether. Toynbee says that Islamic civilization is affiliated to Syriac and Hellenistic civilizations. He denies Islamic civilization an independent character. His characterisation of Islamic civilization as 'Syro-Hellenistic' is evident in the following excerpts:

i) ... "*the Syro-Hellenic 'culture compost' produced an Islamic civilization*"[(1)]

ii) "*The Syriac and Hellenic elements are both ineradicable, not only in Christianity and Islam themselves, but also in Christian and Islamic civilizations for which they have respectively served as chrysalises. ....* Islam, Christianity and the several civilizations that these two religions have mothered, are all products of an identical compost consisting of both Syriac and Hellenic elements.*"[(2)]*

Toynbee reminds us that the civilization of Islam adopted the Nabatean variant of Aramaic alphabet as the Arabic script. In its 'square Hebrew' variant the Aramaic alphabet became the script of Judaism. The Syriac variant of Aramaic alphabet became the script of Christianity. Prior to this, the Achaemenid Empire of Persia adopted Aramaic alphabet as one of the official scripts. Thus the Aramaic influence pervades Islamic, Christian and Achaemenid civilizations.[(3)]

Toynbee further adds that "When Islam was confronted with the need to equip itself with a systematic theology, the Islamic theologians found, as their Christian predecessors had found, that they needed to draw upon Hellenic philosophy for their theological purpose and that they could not do this effectively without going back to the Hellenic fountain-head. From the ninth century of the Christian Era onwards, the works of the Hellenic philosophers and scientists became part of the recognized, and even obligatory, apparatus of Islamic culture, as they had become part of the apparatus of Christian culture; indeed, it was often through Islamic versions that the works of Hellenic philosophers first came to the notice of the medieval Western Society."[(4)]

Thus Toynbee sees that both Islamic and Christian civilizations are related to Syriac and Hellenic civilizations.

Toynbee's interpretation of Islamic civilization is criticised by many Western scholars. Professor Gargan suggests that Toynbee's knowledge of Islamic civilization was limited[(5)]. Professor McNeill suggests that Toynbee's imagination seems to run amuck in his intrepetation of the civilization of Islam. "*In the interest of fitting his data into a pattern he sometimes seems to cut and slice reality in an arbitrary and fantastic fashion. I will mention only one instance of this: His description of the Arab Caliphate as the resumption of Syriac Universal state after a millennium of Hellenic intrusion does not convince me in the least.*"[(6)]

Professor Arnold Toynbee's views on Islam and Islamic civilization were not very flattering. He believed that the western civilization was superior to Islam "not only in arms but also in the technique of economic life, on which military science ultimately depends, and above all in spiritual culture — the inward force which alone creates and sustains the outward manifestations of what is called civilization."[7] He also realized that there was "no more creative force in present-day Islamic society".[8] He also thought that the prospects of Islam were bad[9]. Nevertheless, he expected the Islamic peoples to help the West in solving her racial problem and the problem of alcoholism.[10]

There are many contradictions in Toynbee's thought. He regarded religion as the basis of civilization but he did not grant Islam the capability of building a great civilization. He relegated the Islamic nations and "most other peoples to the role of constituting the proletariat of Western civilization."[11] He regarded the *Sanussis* and the *Wahhabis* as "no more than a 'fossil' of an extinct civilization."[12] Toynbee did not or could not foresee that the *Sanussis* and the *Wahhabis* were spearheading a movement of the resurgence of Islam.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that Toynbee failed to appreciate Islamic civilization. The late Orientalist Gustave E. von Grunebaum rejected Toynbee's interpretation of Islamic civilization and criticised him as follows:

"In collision with Toynbee's theory the civilization of Islam loses its identity — not the only Pyrrhic victory which this theory has to its credit."[13]

Toynbee does not see Islamic civilization as an independent civilization, but classifies it as an 'affiliated civilization'. The alleged affiliation is attributed to Syriac and Hellenic civilizations. As a matter of fact, every civilization borrows from its preceding and neighbouring civiliza-

tions. This process of borrowing according to its needs, does not affect the independent character of a civilization.

Toynbee's interpretation did not only fail to convince his contemporary Western historians, but it also has never been taken seriously by any Islamic scholar. Muslim scholars regard their civilization as an independent civilization, which owes more to the revelation of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad than to any external influence. The Muslim viewpoint on the origin of Islamic civilization is articulated by Muhammad Asad as follows:

"*Islam, being a complete system of life, not only demanded or heralded a new civlization, but actually inaugurated it.*"[14]

NOTES

1. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, (abridged edition), 123;
2. *ibid.*, 422;
3. *ibid.*, 299-300;
4. *ibid.*, 420;
5. Edward T. Gargan, *INTRODUCTION* to *The intent of Toynbee's History*, Chicago, 1961, 20;
6. William H. McNeill, Some basic assumptions of Toynbee's A Study of History, in *The intent of Toynbee's History*, 41;
7. Gotthold Weil, Arnold Toynbee's conception of the future of Islam, in *Toynbee and History: Critical essays and reviews*, edited by M.F. Ashley Montagu, Boston, 1956, 278;
8. *ibid.*, 284;
9. *ibid.*, 278;
10. *ibid.*, 284;
11. *ibid.*, 285;
12. *ibid.*, 279;
13. G.E. von Grunebaum, Toynbee's concept of Islamic civilization, in *The intent of Toynbee's History*, Chicago, 1961, 109;
14. M. Asad, in *ARAFAT: A monthly critique of Muslim thought*, vol. 1, no. iv, Lahore (the Punjab), India, December, 1946, 102.

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF TOYNBEE

Arnold Toynbee characterized Islamic civilization as Syro-Hellenic and he divided it into two segments of "Arabic" and "Iranic". His view of Islamic civilization as an 'affiliated civilization' is, however, not acceptable. Among Toynbee's critics, Gustave von Grunebaum preferred Spengler's characterization of civilizations to that of Toynbee. For instance, Spengler thought of the civilizations he defined as fully developed organisms or personalities. "Toynbee's civilizations or societies, on the other hand, are described merely in terms of what they did or underwent, never in terms of what they were." (cf. *The intent of Toynbee's history*, Chicago, 1961, 107-108).

Another sore point in Toynbee's *History* is that he thought of the Arab Caliphate as an Achaemenid reincarnation or the 'resumption' of Syriac universal state. This analogy is not satisfactory and hence criticised by Professor W. McNeill and others. Toynbee, however, admitted his debt to the German Orientalist von Kremer for supplying this analogy. "Alfred von Kremer, by revealing to me in his *Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen* the morphological resemblance of the Caliphate to the Achaemenian Empire, led me to see in the Caliphate a 'reintegration' or 'resumption' or 'avatar' of the original Syriac universal state after a millennium during which the normal course of the disintegration-process in the life of a broken-down civilization had been interrupted in the Syriac World by the forcible intrusion of Hellenism into the Syriac Society's domain."

(cf. *A Study of history*, Oxford paperback, vol. x, p. 234).

Although we disagree with the substance of Toynbee's interpretation of Islamic civilization, his analysis of Islamic phenomenon is sometimes very original. For instance, his comments on the vitality of Islam deserves our appreciation. He discovered 'intrinsic merit' of Islam as follows: "What was the secret of Islam's power to survive the death of its founder, the downfall of the Primitive Arab empire-builders, the decline of the Arabs' Iranian supplanters, the overthrow of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, and the collapse of the barbarian successor-states that established themselves, for their brief day, on the Caliphate's ruins? The explanation was to be found in the spiritual experience of the converts to Islam among the non-Arab subjects of the Caliphate in the Umayyad Age. "Islam, which they had originally adopted mainly for external reasons [of social self-interest], struck root in their hearts as well, and was taken by them more seriously than by the Arabs themselves.' A religion which thus succeeded in winning loyalty in virtue of its intrinsic religious merits was not doomed to stand or fall with the political regimes which had successively sought to exploit it for non-religious purposes; and this spiritual triumph of Islam was the more remarkable considering that such exploitation for political ends had proved fatal to other higher religions ...."

(cf. *A Study of History*, paperback, vol. 7A, 160).

ART,
CULTURE
AND
CIVILIZATION

The word *art* is derived from the Latin *Ars* which means 'skill, way or method'. All occupations were treated as *art* in ancient Europe. Various branches of learning were known as *liberal arts* which comprise grammar, rhetoric and logic; arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. This was especially true of European Middle Ages. In modern times the term *performing arts* means any artistic activity performed before an audience such as a drama, or a dance or a concert. We also have the term *visual arts* meaning painting and sculpture and to some extent, architecture. Architecture was 'the leading art' in ancient and medieval Europe.

Art usually provides aesthetic enjoyment. 'That the purpose of a work of art is to be enjoyed means, of course, that the experience of works of art can greatly enrich our lives, not only while we are actually looking at them but also in retrospect'.[1]

The Arab scholar Ibn Khaldūn used the word *craft* to refer to any *skill* which also served as a means of

livelihood. The usage of the word *craft* (Ar., *Ṣinā'ah*)[2] also included any branch of learning, or art or profession. Some fine arts like calligraphy, architecture and music were treated as *crafts*. Similarly medicine, astronomy, mathematics and midwifery were indicated as crafts. Industrial skills such as carpentry tailoring, weaving as well as agriculture were designated "crafts". Furthermore, some crafts were classified as necessary (*ḍarūrī*), while others were categorised as noble (*sharīf*)[3]. The usage of the word *ṣinā'ah* covered all available *skills* in a civilization. Ibn Khaldun's term the craft was essentially similar to *Ars* in its European medieval usage.

The aesthetic value of art was recognised by Islamic scholars such as al-Ghazali, al-Tawhidi and Ibn Sina. Ghazali felt that a work of art gives pleasure to the beholder and it is loved for this reason. In other words, an *objet d'art* gives aesthetic satisfaction. In his words, "The beautiful work of an author, the beautiful poem of a poet, the beautiful painting of a painter, or the building of an architect reveal also the inner beauty of these men."[4] Ibn Sina, on the other hand, expressed the 'sensory character' of the beautiful and distinguished 'the art of the good and of the useful'.[5]

Among the many archaeological finds of ancient civilizations such as the Achaemenid civilization, the Egyptiac civilization, the Roman civilization, the Indus Valley civilization, etc. we see a good deal of *objets d'art*. These ancient art treasures are preserved in museums all over the world. The *objets d'art* represent the civilization which produced them. In fact, each civilization produces its own style of art. A masterpiece of art is a timeless treasure of civilization.

Art is the product of *culture*, of which civilization is a species. We have already defined civilization. Now let us try to define *culture*. It is a widely used term which is subject to various interpretations. Edward Taylor tried to

define this word as follows: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"[6]. This is the most comprehensive definition of culture. I see culture manifesting in good manners, clean mentality and aesthetic sensibility. The culture of a nation is mirrored in its language, folklore and spirituality.

Titus Burckhardt, a modern art expert, explains the value of art in a culture, as follows: "*Nothing brings us into such immediate contact with the culture of a bygone age as certain works of art. Whether it is a sacred image, a temple, a cathedral, or a Mosque, it represents the focal point within the culture and expresses something special. It gives us an insight which neither arguments of history nor analyses of social and economic circumstances can capture. The only other source that is equally as informative about a culture is its writings, particularly those writings dealing with the spiritual life. But such works are often very complex and frequently not intelligible without the aid of detailed commentaries. However, a work of art, unencumbered by distracting intellectual digressions, immediately communicates and provides much information about the nature of a particular culture.*"[7]

We have already come across Islamic art in Ibn Khaldun's study of civilization. He discussed music, calligraphy, architecture and so forth. All these arts satisfy man's aesthetic sense. Harmony of sound is music which reveals beauty to human ears. Calligraphy gives man's ideas a beautiful visual expression.

Some men in Western society think that 'art is civilization'. Taking art for civilization some modern scholars have thought that whenever the artisans and craftsmen of one civilization borrow the "art form" of another civilization, it means 'civilization on loan'. Let us, for instance, take the ceramic art. The Chinese ceramics had

great influence on the development of ceramic art of Asia and Europe. It reached Baghdad by 800 A.D. and inspired Mesopotamian potters to imitate the Chinese ceramics. Consequently, they produced high quality glazed ceramics. The Blue-and-white ceramic of China had its impact on the Far East as well as Europe in the 15th century A.D. The Italian ceramic called Majolica ("in Baghdad style") spread as far as the Netherlands within hundred years. The Ottoman Turkish potters produced Golden Horn ceramics and Isnik ceramic tiles in excellent quality and large quantity in imitation of the Chinese porcelain. The Chinese Blue-and-white ceramics also had its impact on Indo-China, Japan (e.g., Arita porcelain), Persia and Europe.[8]

Similarly the interlace motif of Arab and Persian art had its influence on Europe[9] and Latin America[10]. The interlace motif was both "aesthetically pleasing and in accord with the philosophical foundation of civilizations which produce it." The Islamic interlacing motif appears prominently in the Alhambra of Spain. It encouraged symmetry[11] in European art for thousand years until the 18th century.

However, Arnold Toynbee had a different view of art. He says, "The visible works of art that reveal so much about their civilization are merely manifestations of it. They are not the civilization itself."[12]

Civilizations, like languages, come into existence and they also die in course of time. But many *objets d'art* outlive the civilization that produces them.

NOTES

1. Frederick Hartt, *ART: A history of painting, sculpture and architecture*, New York, 1976, 14;

2. Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, Beirut, n.d., 399-400; Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, ii, 346;
3. *ibid.*, 405; Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, ii, 355-56; Cf. also M.A.J. Beg, *Wisdom of Islamic civilization*, Kuala Lumpur, 1980, 83-84;
4. M.A.J. Beg (editor), *Fine arts in Islamic civilization*, Kuala Lumpur, 1981, 24-25; and 28-29;
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7. Titus Burckhardt, *Moorish culture in Spain*, London, 1972, 9;
8. Heinz Edgar Kiewe et al, *Civilization on loan*, Oxford, 1973; 138-39;
9. *ibid.*, 365;
10. T.B. Irving, Islamic motifs in Spanish and Latin American architecture, in *Fine arts in Islamic civilization*, edited by M.A.J. Beg, Kuala Lumpur, 1981, 118-143;
11. H.E. Kiewe, *op. cit.*, 365-369;
12. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, (abridged edition), London, 1972, 46; 464.
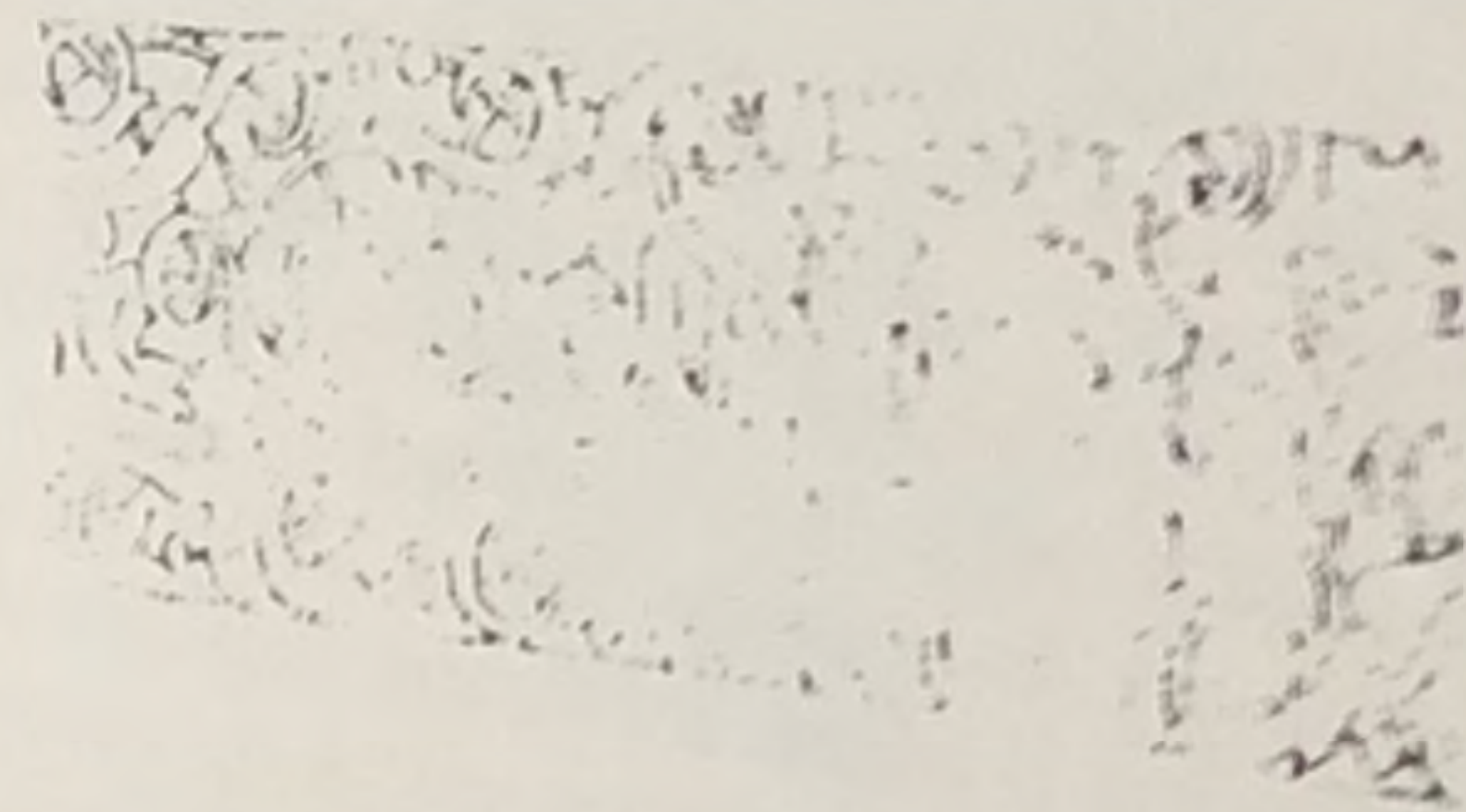
CHAPTER

8

LAW
AND
CIVILIZATION:

Ibn Khaldūn anticipated close connection between Law and civilization. He said, "Injustice is the destroyer of civilization."[1] (*Al-Zulm mukharrib li'l-'umrān*). To put his sentence reversely, it would read, 'Justice protects civilization'.

Injustice (*zulm*) is defined by Ibn Khaldūn as follows: "*Whoever takes some one's property, or uses him for forced labour, or presses an unjustified claim against him, or imposes upon him a duty not required by religious law, does an injudtice to that particular person. People who collect unjustified taxes commit an injustice. Those who infringe upon property, commit an injustice. Those who take away property commit an injustice. Those who deny people their rights commit an injustice. Those who in general, take property by force, commit an injustice.*"[2] Injustice in any form causes internal friction within a society. This is why Islamic law forbade *Zulm* (injustice). Law ensures justice, and justice ensures the continuity and vigour of a civilization.

Professor Tsirintanes, a Greek lawyer, also affirms the relationship between Law and civilization. He says, "A

true civilization is particularly sensitive to the matter of 'fair law', or I should say, 'inspired law.' Civilization and the whole of mankind thirst for justice. The law will remain, therefore, as a value of civilization in so far as it is actually an agent of justice."[3]

The role of Law in civilization is recognized in Islamic as well as Western thought. A modern Muslim scholar, namely, Muhammad Asad, thinks that the *Sharī'ah* (*Islamic Law*) is a matter of great significance to Islamic civilization. He argues that the destiny of the Islamic Community (*Ummah*) is tied up with the revealed Law or Canonical law of Islam. "*For from the very start*," writes Muhammad Asad, "*our civilization was built on the foundations supplied by the Shari'ah alone.*"[4]

Professor Schacht also realized that Islamic Law held a position of paramount importance in Islamic civilization. He wrote, "*The modern period, in the Western sense of the term, saw the rise of two great Islamic states on the ruins of the previous order, the Ottoman Empire in the Near East and the Mogul (sic) Empire in India; in both empires in their hey-days (the sixteenth and the seventeenth century respectively) Islamic law enjoyed the highest degree of actual efficiency which it had ever possessed in a society of high material civilization since the early 'Abbasid period*".[5]

Civilization cannot survive without Law.

NOTES

1. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Beirut, n.d., 288; cf. also *al-Muqaddimah* (selected texts arranged by R. Ibrahim and A. Zaki), Cairo, 1960, 188-89;
2. Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah* (Cairo edition, 1960), 188-89; idem, The Muqaddimah, (English translation by F. Rosenthal) vol. ii, 106-107; *The Muqaddimah* (abridged by

N.J. Dawood), London, 1978, 240;

3. Alexander N. Tsirintanes, "In the succession of civilizations", in *Civilization: the past and the future*, Amsterdam/London, and New York, 1967, 108;

4. Muhammad Asad, *ARAFAT*, Lahore, 1946, vol. i, no. 1, 30-31;

5. J. Schacht, *An introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, 4.

CHAPTER

9

RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION:

The system of faith or religion of a people is relevant to the study of civilization. A number of modern scholars, Arab as well as European and American, realized the fact that higher religions (such as Islam, Christianity, etc.) have played a definite role in the formation of cultures and civilizations. It has been asserted by some modern scholars that Oriental Civilizations cannot be properly understood without a reference to higher religions of Asia[1]. Among the great Muslim scholars of early 20th century, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh realized the fact that all civilizations (*madaniyyāt*) of mankind were based on the foundations of religion. He believed that the civilizations of ancient nations such as the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Greeks were also based on religious foundations,[2] although these nations had only paganistic Faiths. Finally, 'Abduh comes to the conclusion that *"Adherence to the Prophets and the guidance of religion provides the basis for every civilization. Because spiritual progress leads to material developments."*[3]

Many scholars share the view that ISLAM played a positive role in the formation and growth of Islamic civilization. Professor Feibleman, who is critical about

the origin of Islamic civlization, reaches the dramatic conclusion that *"Religion leads to culture, and culture to civilization, as the radius of influence widens."*[4] This is Feibleman's theory of the origin of Islamic civilization. But this theory can be applied to some other civilizations as well. It seems that Feibleman's theory lends support to 'Abduh's thought on the basis of civilization. Another scholar, Richard E. Sullivan, also supports the religio-centric theory of Islamic civilization, and says, "Moslem civilization was the product of Moslem religion."[5] There are other scholars who question the validity of the theory that 'religion creates civilization'. Among these skeptic historians we find Edward Burns, Philip Ralph, and so forth. Even these historians concede that 'in the case of the Arabs, it was a new religion which undoubtedly provided much of the driving force behind the development of their civilization."[6]

Thus we find that many modern historians, theologians and writers (like Sullivan, Feibleman, Edward Burns, 'Abduh, Asad, and so forth) realized that Islam was the primary source of Islamic civilization. We quote JOMIER's statement as our final impression on the civilizing role of religion: *".........The barbarians were assimilated by the countries they conquered, whereas Islam on the contrary imposed itself upon old civilizations." "ISLAM supplied the creative element out of which arose a new civilization."*[7]

NOTES

1. Thomas Berry, The spiritual form of oriental civilizations, in *Approaches to Asian civilizations*, Columbia, U.S.A., 1966, 86;
2. Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Cairo, 1374/1954, IV, 429;
3. *ibid.*, 429;
4. James K. Feibleman, *Understanding civilizations*, New York, 1975, 201;

5. R.E. Sullivan, *Heirs of the Roman Empire*, Cornell, 1968, 9;
6. E. Burns and P. Ralph, *World civilizations from ancient to contemporary*, New York, 1964, vol. i, 391; The authors of the book *World Civilizations* say, "Whether the Saracenic civilization would ever have originated without the development of the Moslem religion is a question almost impossible to answer. It is commonly assumed that a new religion was necessary to unite the people and to imbue them with ardor in a common cause. Yet other nations had expanded before this and had accomplished great things without the influence of any inspiring system of belief. Nevertheless, in the case of the Arabs it was a new religion which undoubtedly provided much of the driving force behind the development of their civilization."

This illuminating commentary of Burns and Ralph on Saracenic civilization is commendable. At least they have recognised the role of Islam as the prime factor behind the development of Islamic civilization. They seem to have granted Islam a civilizing role with much reluctance and skepticism. We appreciate their critical understanding.

7. J. Jomier, article "Islam", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. IV, Fasc. 63-64, 175.

ALFRED L. KROEBER'S VIEWPOINT OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Alfred Kroeber was a famous anthropologist. He devoted much of his time to study ethnology, linguistics and the phenomena of culture. He has also written articles on comparative civilizations. His viewpoint of Islam as a cultural phenomenon is interesting and contrasts sharply with the views of Orientalists and Islamists. For instance, he says that Islamic civilization began with "a new religion". This view is akin to the theory of 'Abduh, Feibleman, Jomier, Ralph and Burns cited earlier.

We quoted Kroeber's controversial view as follows:

"Arabic Islamic civilization, that is, the civilization carried by Mohammedans using the Arabic language as their medium of culture — that most of them were not Arabians by blood does not matter in the present connection, — is peculiar in several regards.

First, it began, definitely and almost completely, with a new religion. The only phenomenon which is in conflict with this statement is the existence of a pan-Arabic lyric poetry for at least a century before Mohammed.

Second, this religion was a hybrid and contained no essential element of novelty — other than relation to personality, speech, and place — except its extreme simplification.

Third, superficially due to association with an accidental feature of this religion, but in reality probably owing to more complex and less obvious causes, this civilization did not attempt visible aesthetic representation. Sculpture, painting, and drama, in the ordinary sense, are therefore lacking.

Fourth, the civilization was predominantly a verbalizing one, in its higher accomplishments. Its principal achievements are religious, literary, philological, philosophical, scientific, and architectural. Of these, only architecture and, in part, science are nonverbal. There is an old proverb: that God gave the Greeks skill with the head, the Chinese with the hands, but us Arabs with the tongue." (cf. *Configurations of Culture Growth*, University of California Press, 1944, 695).

APPENDIX – 1
A MODERN ISLAMIC VIEWPOINT OF CIVILIZATION

At the completion of the foregoing essay on "ISLAMIC AND WESTERN CONCEPTS OF CIVILIZATION", we have come across some interesting ideas of 'civilization' by an Islamic scholar, namely, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzām, an Arab statesman of the 20th century. 'Azzām's views on various matters relating to civilization corroborate our ideas, at least partially. Therefore, we quote some excerpts from 'Azzām's writing:

"........ Several thousand years of history teach us that civilization does not confine itself to any particular area, nor is it the monopoly of any people."[1]

"There is no doubt that righteous belief clothed in piety is the primary force that builds a civilization; the loss of righteous belief presages civilization's doom. Furthermore, the faith that rests on a set of beliefs suitable for progress engenders and gives power to righteous laws and ethical behaviour. These are the forces that organize civilization, and are the prelude to the decisive phase of a civilization's growth."[2]

"........ Whereas the foundations of Islamic civilization are moral and spiritual, those of materialistic civilization are utilitarian."[3]

"The bulwork of Islamic civilization is spirituality, and the proper guardians of civilization are thus the most pious and most beneficent."[4]

1. 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzām, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, (A Mentor book), New York, 1965, 218; 2. *ibid.*, 228; 3. *ibid.*, 218; 4. *ibid.*, 223;

"The egress of the Arabs from the peninsula, and their expansion, their bridging of old and modern civilization, and their innovations in and cultivation of sciences and industries were not due to local economic reasons, even as the fall of the Arabs, the Romans, the Egyptians and the Babylonians was not due to barren lands, changing climates, or new routes and newly discovered lands."[5]

"The history of mankind indicates that civilization is a torch passed on from age to age and shows how the nations that produced the greatesat civilizations eventually fell from the apogee to the perigree of their glory."[6]

"If we want to be specific in our views, we will discover that spiritual and moral causes have always contributed substantially to the emergence or disappearance of a civilization ...."[7]

5. *ibid.*, 224; 6. *ibid.*, 223; 7. *ibid.*, 225.

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